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# **Predicting Hotel Attractiveness via Personality Traits of Applicants: The Moderating Role of Self-Esteem and Work Experience**

**Victoria Bellou (\*)**

*Department of Economics, University of Thessaly, 43 Korai Str., 38333, Volos, Greece*

**Nikolaos Stylos**

*Department of Management, School of Economics, Finance and Management, University of Bristol, Priory Road Complex, Priory Road, Bristol, BS8 1TU, United Kingdom*

**Roya Rahimi**

*Department of Marketing, Innovation, Leisure and Enterprise, University of Wolverhampton Business School, Faculty of Social Sciences, MN Building, Nursery Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1AD, England, United Kingdom*

## **(\*) Corresponding Author**

**Purpose** – Despite the fact that hotels rely heavily upon frontline employees, extant evidence on what makes a hotel attractive in the eyes of job applicants is scarce. Thus, this study incorporates the Big Five (BF) personality traits model to identify what potential hotel job applicants are likely to seek in their prospective employers.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Applicants for non-managerial, frontline posts at upscale hotels were approached via 3 branches of a career agency located in England, UK; their responses were gathered via a self-administered questionnaire. The 522 usable responses were utilized in a covariance-based, multi-group structural equation modeling scheme to investigate three main research propositions with regards to the applicants' personality traits' influence on their perceptions of a hotel's attractiveness as a potential employer.

**Findings** - Analysis of responses indicates significant differences regarding the impact of extraversion, conscientiousness and openness on perceived facets of employer attractiveness. Additionally, findings suggest that high self-esteem does make applicants more demanding

while work experience also influences their preferences regarding the hotels' profiles as an employer.

**Research limitations/implications** - The results of this study are limited to applicants for non-managerial, frontline job positions in upscale hotels in the UK.

**Practical implications** - Practically, this study offers practitioners valuable feedback regarding the potential applicant's personality profile that grants the best fit with a hotel.

**Originality/value**—While different studies tried to identify the organizations' attributes that attract potential applicants, evidence on what attracts individuals to a hotel is very limited. Hence, the present study tries to address this gap and link potential applicants' personality profiles with that of hotels as employers.

**Keywords:** *hotel attractiveness, job applicants, big five, self-esteem, hotel sector, UK*

## **1. Introduction**

In the UK hotel industry, job applicants look at the potential job as a starting point of their career and not an end itself (Rahimi and Gunlu, 2016). Given that the hotel industry is a people industry (Rahimi, 2017), emphasis ought to be given to understanding prospective ones, as they are the ones that will form the human basis of the organizations in the (near) future (Holland et al., 2007). A number of studies have linked applicants' characteristics – including personality – with job post descriptions (Morgeson et al., 2005; Theron, 2009). In this vein, researchers have stressed the need to focus on personality traits that influence preferences relating to employment characteristics (e.g. Barrick et al., 2013; Horng et al., 2016; Kozako et al., 2013). This paper, in congruence with the Person-Environment (P-E) fit theory (Kristof, 1996) and the Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) cycle (Schneider, 1987), adopts the BF personality traits model as the means to predict the facets of hotel employer attractiveness that are most valued by different types of job applicants. Put differently, given that individuals and organizations pursue the best possible fit, it is likely that a unique value proposition can exist for both, based on their personality profile. Additionally, in line with previous research another core self-characteristic, namely self-esteem, is examined as a moderator in the relationship between the personality characteristics of potential applicants and their view of preferred employer characteristics. Self-esteem is deemed to be fundamental to the evaluations that individuals make for themselves, others and the environment (Judge et al., 2007), and may thus cause significant variations in applicants' perceptions and preferences (Jang and George, 2012). Finally, since work experience may also largely influence applicants' preferences and expectations from their future employers (Gu & Chi Sen Siu, 2009), comparisons are made between those with and without prior experience in the hotel industry. The conceptual model examined in this study appears in Figure 1.

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Please insert Figure 1 about here  
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From a theoretical point of view, individual level variables have grown in importance and popularity over the past decade in the attractiveness literature (e.g. Sivertzen et al., 2013). Nevertheless, while different studies tried to identify the organizations' attributes that attract potential applicants (e.g. Roberson et al., 2005), very limited number of studies have tried to investigate how personality characteristics influence an individual's decision to apply for a job opening and accept a job offer (e.g. Ng et al., 2007; Schreurs et al., 2009) but none has examined the potential influences of personality characteristics on employer attractiveness, despite the fact that they are the first to be assessed during interviews (Huffcutt et al., 2001).

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first effort to link potential applicants' personality profiles' with the desired profile of hotels as employers. Additionally, although the importance of being attractive as an employee has been widely acknowledged in the war for talent (Rosengren and Bondesson, 2014), there is still a lot to learn in the hotel industry. On a practical basis, identifying the influence that personality traits of potential applicants have on their perceptions of what is mostly attractive in a hotel work setting, increases the likelihood that these individuals will apply for a job there and accept it, should the circumstances allow.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Employer Attractiveness*

In a recruitment and selection process both the individual and organization are making decisions about one another (Breaugh, 2017). On the recruitment side organizations select individuals who best fit their needs and expectations. On the applicant side, based on their previous experiences, interests, needs, preferences, and personality, individuals make an assessment of potential employers (Lievens et al., 2001). Once applicants find a job in an organization that fulfills their minimum employability criteria, they tend to confirm this choice. In this vein, Berthon et al. (2005: 156) defined employer attractiveness as '*the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization*'. Thus, the more attractive an employer is perceived to be by potential employees, the more willing they are to work for that specific company.

Up until now, a number of scholars have tried to identify the organizational attributes that make a workplace attractive to a potential applicant (e.g. Newbury et al., 2006; Ng & Burke, 2005). Cable and Judge (1994) found that job seekers prefer organizations with similar values. In this vein, Berthon et al. (2005) identified five types of values (i.e. interest, social, economic, development, and application). Other researchers have found that organization structure (Turban and Keon, 1993), reward systems (Bretz et al., 1989), organization corporate social performance (Albinger and Freeman, 2000), and organizational image and brand (Sivertzen et al., 2013) are key factors when selecting a workplace.

## *2.2 The BF Personality Traits*

The BF model is a widely acknowledged typology for monitoring personality (Lounsbury et al., 2012), comprising five distinct traits, namely extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. *Extraversion* is exemplified by social ability, positive emotionality, high levels of energy and ambition (Barrick et al., 2001).

Extravert employees are often trusted by others (customers or co-workers) due to the fact that they are social, talkative and communicative, thus contributing to a pleasant workplace environment. They also seek and enjoy stimulation and interactions – especially with supervisors – being motivated by status and rewards (Zimmerman, 2008). As they enjoy being with people, they prefer working in groups and drawing attention to themselves (Panaccio and Vandenberghe, 2012). *Agreeableness* is the tendency to be cooperative, friendly, helpful, trusting and kind (Judge and Ilies, 2002). Costa and McCrae (1992) and Goldberg (1992) describe an agreeable individual as altruistic, fair and generous to others, who values getting along with others and is dedicated to achieving that. Such an employee can also demonstrate exceptional control abilities in anger regulation and control inhibition (Ahadi and Rothbart, 1994). *Conscientiousness* refers to an individual's ability to show discipline, determination, hard work and carefulness (Costa and McCrae, 1992). This trait is also linked with advanced problem solving and effective time-energy management (Connor-Smith and Flachsbart, 2007). A conscientious employee usually demonstrates above satisfactory job performance irrespective of job position (Barrick et al, 1991). As regards *neuroticism*, this refers to low levels of emotional stability (Judge et al, 1999), with emotional stability being the tendency to feel calm, satisfied, comfortable, stable and secure (Barrick et al., 1991). Finally, *openness* to experience refers to intelligence and broad-mindedness (Ciavarella et al., 2004). Individuals that are open to new experience are curious, adventurous, appreciate art, innovative, imaginative (Barrick et al., 1991), creative and unconventional (McCrae, 1996), and likely to consider new perspectives and possibilities (Michel et al., 2011). As a consequence, openness is positively related with problem solving abilities (Connor-Smith and Flachsbart, 2007). In contrast, employees who are conservative and resistant to change opt for familiarity instead of innovation (McCrae and Costa, 1987).

Within the hospitality and hotel literature, there is evidence of the distinctive role of the BF personality traits on employee attitudinal and behavioral responses these traits. For example, Kim et al. (2007) have shown that extraversion plays a key role in hotel employees' job performance, and therefore this should potentially be considered in the recruitment process. In fact, it has been argued that young individuals demonstrating high levels of extraversion are expected to fit posts in the hospitality industry very well (Teng, 2008). Furthermore, agreeableness is another important trait, reflecting hotel employees' capability to identify guests' needs and care about their well-being (Kim, 2008); job candidates with high levels of agreeableness tend to contribute to supporting long-term relationships with hotel guests, thus reducing marketing costs and increasing overall profitability (Jones & Jones, 1990). As Kim et al. (2007) note, agreeableness is particularly important for frontline employees working for high-rating hotel units, because of guests' increased expectations. In another study, Kozako et al. (2013) investigated the influence of BF personality traits on counterproductive work behavior, revealing a positive relationship between employees with high neuroticism and openness to experience, and a negative relationship with agreeableness. Consequently, evidence suggests that individuals who combine high levels of extraversion and agreeableness, and low levels of neuroticism are considered the best frontline employees for the hotel sector, because they are sociable, open and happy to assist guests, and at the same time sustain pressure, leading to higher professional efficacy and personal fulfillment (Kim et al. 2009).

### *2.3 The Impact of BF Traits on Perceptions of Employer Attractiveness*

Personality traits have been proven to be fundamental to the prediction of individual behavior within the work setting (Kozako et al., 2013). According to the theory of individual dispositions, individuals have the tendency to act in a way that reflects their internal



characteristics (Heller et al., 2009), thus explaining differences in terms of perceptions, feelings, and behavior among individuals towards the same reality. Given that disposition is *'a habit, a preparation, a state of readiness, or a characteristic tendency to act in a specified way'* (Cohrs et al., 2006, p. 346), it presumes that different individuals may ascribe varying levels of importance to different facets of hotel attractiveness as an employer. Besides, previous researchers have already highlighted the need to investigate the impact of personality on employment preferences (Erdle and Rushton, 2010). As Murray and Ayoun (2010) postulate, the hotel industry should establish practices and organizational behaviors that increase employer attractiveness, hence leveraging the most talented young people to staff the hotel units and support their operations. In a similar vein, Martin et al. (2006) show that recruitment of the best hospitality staff available in the market can be better achieved through satisfying *'their "intrinsic needs" than improving the "extrinsic environment"'*. (p. 385).

Combining the theory of individual dispositions with the ASA cycle and the P-E fit suggests that potential applicants are likely to search for different facets of hotel attractiveness as an employer. Specifically, the Attraction–Selection–Attrition cycle (Schneider, 1987) advocates that organizations are likely to attract, select and retain those individuals that match its profile. Thus, individuals that apply for a job position and actually decide to accept a job offer tend to reflect the priorities of the organization itself. Similarly, according to the P-E fit theory (Kristof, 1996), both current and prospective employees search for a fit between themselves and their working environment. Indeed, there is a good fit between an individual and the work environment, positive outcomes for both individuals and the organization (e.g. career success and favorable employee attitudes and behavior) are likely to emerge and vice versa (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This has also been supported for hotel frontline employees, who actually represent their organization in terms of mission,

beliefs, and values in the eyes of guests. The better the match between the personality and motives of frontline employees and the hotel's organizational culture and strategy, the higher the work satisfaction and organizational commitment observed on behalf of the employees (Liang, 2012; Ro and Chen, 2011). As a result, this is frequently reflected in employees' job performance, the hotel's performance, as well as the quality of their personal and organizational citizenship in the wider community (Buil et al., 2016; Park and Levy, 2014).

Taken together, this study seeks to offer insight into how individual personality traits may facilitate or impede their attraction by hotels, based on the values and priorities that the latter have. Interestingly, up until now the BF typology has only been investigated as a moderator in the relationships between selected organizational characteristics and employee attractiveness by Lievens et al. (2001). As the authors have noted, personality traits can significantly influence the way that employees observe, perceive, and evaluate their current and future employers. Combining all these, the proposition here is that:

*P1: The BF personality traits are significantly related to facets of employer attractiveness in the hotel industry*

#### *2.4 Self-esteem as a Moderator*

Self-esteem has been typically defined as an individual's overall sense of worthiness as a person (Rosenberg, 1979). It is the general appraisal people make of themselves and is the most fundamental core-evaluation of the self, because it represents the overall value that one places on oneself as a person (Harter, 1990). Particularly for the hotel industry, it has been shown that young employees with high self-esteem tend to experience an enhanced state of attachment to the working environment, leading to exceeding guests' expectations in service

provision (Ro and Chen, 2011), and a considerably lower intention to quit their posts (Park & Gursay, 2012). Additionally, Judge et al. (2007) postulated that being central to evaluations that individuals make for themselves, self-esteem may cause significant deviations in individuals' perceptions and preferences.

The moderating role of self-esteem has long been recognized (e.g. Jex and Elacqua, 1999; Pierce and Gardner, 2004), mostly in terms of the effect of external conditions and job satisfaction and job performance. In line with the behavioral plasticity theory (Brockner, 1998), individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to yield to external factors and adjust their behavior more than their high self-esteem counterparts.

Concerning the proposed moderating role of self-esteem between personality traits and desired future employer profile, this is based upon the combination of two lines of thinking. First, in two studies of his, Korman (1967, 1969) found that self-esteem moderated the vocational choice process, in such a way that individuals with high self-esteem made different choices compared to those with low self-esteem (the former searched more for occupations with high abilities and self-fulfillment). Thus, in congruence with the cognitive consistency theory (Korman, 1970), *'All other things being equal, individuals will engage in and find satisfying those behavioral roles which will maximize their sense of cognitive balance or consistency'* (p. 32). In a similar vein, in more recent work, Judge and Bono (2001) also recognized the key role of self-esteem for career, organization, and job choices. Second, in their meta-analysis on self-esteem, Pierce and Gardner (2004), realizing the gap in the literature in the examination of personality characteristics and self-esteem, emphasize the need for further research in this direction. In fact, as they note *'it would be beneficial to examine OBSE (organizational based self-esteem) in relation to the Big Five'* (p. 616).

Taken together, our expectation here is that:

*P2: Self-esteem moderates the impact that the BF personality traits have on various facets of employer attractiveness in the hotel industry.*

## *2.5 The role of Work Experience*

Another factor we expect to play a key role in delineating the relationship between the BF traits and employer attractiveness is work experience. Cole and his colleagues (2003) recognized work experience as one of the three main categories of résumé content (along with academic achievement and activities), to cause divergences during the application and selection process.

In this sense, work experience has been included in several studies as a control variable examining the preferences of applicants (e.g. Horng et al., 2016; Kim, Shin, & Swanger, 2009). Moreover, in their qualitative study, Wilden et al., (2010) found that work experience in the sector could explain variations in job seekers' evaluation of employer attractiveness, as it increased the expected utility from the organization (i.e., experienced applicants made choices based on potential career development whereas less experienced individuals seemed to settle for gaining income). Similarly, Lievens et al (2001) showed that work experience influences individuals' attitudes towards organizations while Dokko et al. (2009) argued that experienced employees carry cognitions and behaviors that may *'influence workers' assumptions about how work should be done'* (p. 52). Therefore, experienced job applicants may have different expectations with respect to a new working environment than individuals without work experience in a particular industry (Rynes, 1989). Finally, it has been shown that work experience may cause variations on the consequences of the BF traits (e.g. Wolff and Kim, 2012)

As a result, we propose that:

*P3: Individuals' work experience in the hotel industry may cause significant variations in the direct- and the moderated by self-esteem relationship between the BF personality traits and the various facets of employer attractiveness*

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Methodology and procedures*

This primary research study involved applicants for various non-managerial, frontline job posts in upscale hotels in the UK. Participants were approached at 3 branches of a recruitment agency and their responses were gathered by means of a self-administered questionnaire. Other than reducing pressure on participants while carrying out data collection (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone, 2002), we also utilized the original item scales to include positive and negative statements (Schriesheim and Eisenbach, 1995), and scrambled the order of questions (Geiger et al., 1993) for half of the distributed questionnaires in order to enhance the content validity and reliability of measurements.

#### *3.2 Sampling procedure and data collection*

The study focused on the job market of the UK hotel sector. Survey participants were approached via the three branches of a UK based career recruitment agency, while they were visiting the agency's headquarters in London to receive recruitment services. All of them held an undergraduate degree in tourism and hospitality and were looking for a variety of non-managerial, frontline roles to serve within upscale hotels. Selection of individuals was based

on systematic random sampling of the particular population. Every second individual that was booked for an appointment/interview for a job was targeted and consequently asked to participate in the research study. Potential respondents were approached right after they had concluded their meeting with the recruiting agent. Survey participants were asked to provide their responses on a printed version of the questionnaire, and hand it in following completion.

Field research coordinators made sure that anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation in the survey were met. From a total of 634 job applicants that were invited to participate in the survey, 576 agreed to do so during the 15 working days' period of March 6-24, 2017. Overall, 522 usable questionnaires were gathered from 256 inexperienced applicants and 266 experienced ones, producing a final response rate of 82.33%.

### *3.3 Measures*

*BF Personality Traits:* The 10-item scale proposed by Gosling et al. (2003), which was extracted from the work of Goldberg (1992) and John and Srivastava (1999) on Big-Five markers, was employed. Survey participants were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored with "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree".

*Self-esteem:* In this study we measured self-esteem with the original 10-item scale proposed by Rosenberg (1965). Respondents were asked to rate the two-dimensional self-esteem construct, by means of 5 items per dimension, on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree".

*Employer attractiveness:* It was measured with a 25-item scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005). Respondents were asked to rate the importance of job features, conditions and

potentials when considering potential employers. A 7-point semantic differential scale was employed with anchors of “1 = extremely unlikely” and “7 = extremely likely”.

*Work Experience:* It was measured via one item, asking survey participants whether they had any work experience in the hotel industry. Their responses were coded using a nominal dummy variable, where “0 = no” and “1 = yes”.

### *3.4 Data preparation and analysis*

Prior to factor analysis and structural equation modeling, we conducted Missing Values Analysis and estimated skewness and kurtosis. Then, we performed Principal Components Analysis (PCA-promax rotation with Kaiser normalization) to examine the dimensionality of the proposed scales, after checking the internal consistency measures of the constructs. Furthermore, multivariate normality was assessed to ensure that no significant deviations exist (McDonald and Ho, 2002).

Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of the constructs were all found to exceed the minimum standard of 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Also, Bartlett’s test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance for all latent construct dimensions. Subsequently, the employer attractiveness scale was reduced from 25 to 23 items (items ‘*feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organization*’ and ‘*hands-on inter-departmental experience*’ were excluded) by utilizing component factor analysis. PCA also revealed that a self-esteem item ‘*all in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure*’ – should be excluded, due to a factor loading of less than 0.35, thus resulting in a 9-item scale.

In the case of employer attractiveness, initially Exploratory Factor Analysis was implemented, as this scale has not been previously utilized in the hotel literature. EFA

revealed 5 factors, explaining 61.23% of total variance. The number of factors per construct was also ratified by executing a series of parallel analyses for each one of the three constructs.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was then applied based on a multigroup configuration with work status as the moderating variable resulting in the ratification of the theoretical pattern of factorial structure and corresponding loading of indicators on the specific constructs, except for the item *‘the organization is guest-orientated’* on the employer attractiveness scale. That item was excluded due to having a factor loading of below 0.50 (Janssens et al., 2008). For discriminant validity, the square root of average variance extracted for each construct was found in all cases to be greater than the estimated correlation of the factors. Appendix A provides the final scales resulted from CFA.

Before testing the propositions of this study, there is a need to perform an invariance test as a prior action between individuals with and without work experience. For this reason, configural and metric invariance have been checked. The model fits the sample of 522 job applicants satisfactorily, supporting the factorial structure of the measurement model when it is estimated freely, and the chi-squared difference test reveals that the two groups are invariant. Table 1 shows the fit indices of the measurement and structural multigroup models.

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## 4. Results



With regards to regression weights for paths involved in the structural model, the significance of a series of direct influences from BF traits on hotel attractiveness moderated by self-esteem are tested, and the paths that are significant for at least one of the two groups of respondents are presented on Table 2 and Figure 2. Conscientiousness exerts significant effects on all five forms of employer attractiveness, whereas the rest demonstrate significant effects for only one of those two groups (e.g. the effect on attracting working environment:  $\beta_{In} = -0.351$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and  $\beta_{Ex} = -0.067$ ,  $p = 0.359 > 0.05$ ). Then, openness to new experiences seems to have significant and positive relationships with attractive working environment and social responsibility for applicants with previous employment in the industry, although this is not the case for those with no working experience in the industry. Each of the extraversion and agreeableness factors has only one significant relationship with development opportunities and attractive rewards, respectively. Finally, none of the five facets of employer attractiveness seems to be significantly influenced and, thus, shaped by emotional stability. Therefore, findings offer partial support to proposition P1.

Furthermore, there are significant interaction effects of self-esteem on the relationships between the five personality characteristics and the five facets of employer attractiveness, and in specific on: a) the negative relationship between conscientiousness and attractive working environment that are of different directions for both groups of job applicants, b) the negative relationship between conscientiousness and recognition and healthy relationships that further strengthens for both groups of respondents and c) the relationship between conscientiousness and social responsibility, with the interactions having different sign for both groups of participants. Furthermore, self-esteem moderates the influence of openness to new experiences on an attractive working environment, with the interaction effects reducing that influence between independent and dependent variables in both groups of applicants. The rest of the significant relationships between personality traits

and employer attractiveness factors are not moderated by self-esteem, thus overall providing only partial support to P2 for all applicants. All significant interaction effects exerted by self-esteem are graphically presented in Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6.

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To test proposition, P<sub>3</sub>, we examined the critical ratios differences in the relationships tested between the two groups of respondents showed some significant differences in both the direct and interaction effects driven by self-esteem (Table 3). Significant differences have been encountered in the relationship between extraversion and development opportunities, as well as on the effects of conscientiousness on attractive working environment and also on recognition and healthy relationships. Openness to new experiences predicts interest for attractive working environment and social responsibility for both inexperienced and experienced applicants, however the magnitude and direction of the effects differ significantly in both cases. Regarding the self-esteem interaction effects, Table 3 shows that in three out of four cases there are significant differences between the two groups of respondents with all of them being very intense as per the corresponding z-scores. However,

many of the relationships tested with respect to the group moderator did not exhibit any significant differences. Therefore, P3 is only partially supported by our findings.

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Please insert Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 about here

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The proposed model has high predictive power for both groups under investigation with  $R^2$  values greatly surpassing the 25% benchmark for large effects (Cohen, 1988). Specifically, the model explained 72% and 77% of development opportunities variance for the applicants with previous employment in the hotel industry and applicants without previous employment, respectively. Also, 67% and 55% of attractive working environment, 58% and 33% of recognition and healthy relationships, 36% and 21% of social responsibility, and 62% and 65% of attractive rewards for the two groups, respectively.

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Please insert Table 3 about here

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## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

### *5.1 Conclusions*

Considering the fundamental role of employees for the success of organizations, the current study incorporated personality traits to identify what applicants for non-managerial

frontline job positions of upscale hotels in UK are likely to value (and thus expect to get in order to be satisfied) from their prospective employer, increasing therefore the chances to decide to join and then remain with that employer.

As regards the relationship between the BF personality traits and the facets of employer attractiveness, interesting findings emerged. Specifically, extraversion seems to increase the desire of applicants for development opportunities. This finding could be attributed to the hierarchical job position they applied for and the service-related industry this belongs to. Specifically, given extraversion urges individuals to communicate and socialize, and that the hotel industry is largely based upon social interactions (Worsfold, 1989), it is only natural for extravert individuals to try to build their career within such organizations. Additionally, since non-managerial frontline job positions are entry level, extravert applicants wish to join an employer that can offer its members the opportunity to develop themselves.

Concerning conscientiousness, this seems to reduce the desire for development opportunities, an attractive working environment and recognition and healthy relationships. Given that applicants with high conscientiousness like discipline, hard work and strict rules (Costa and McCrae, 1992), it is likely that the hard to predict nature of service interaction discourages them from a long-term stay and development in the hotel industry.

In regard to individuals open to new experience being curious, adventurous, innovative, imaginative, creative and unconventional, likely to consider new perspectives and possibilities, it is no wonder that they seek an attractive working environment—that can keep their interest vivid—and social responsibility. As regards agreeableness, reflecting the tendency to be cooperative, friendly, helpful, trusting and kind, their need for attractive rewards may be explained by the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1987) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960); since serving guests well is based upon the key agreeableness

characteristics, agreeable applicants may expect the organization to return rewards that reflect their contribution to the hotel.

Finally, our results revealed that neuroticism is a characteristic that does not influence applicants' perceptions on any of the facets of hotel attractiveness as potential employers. A reason for this could be that individuals with high neuroticism, being more vulnerable to distress (Lincoln et al., 2003), may avoid applying for frontline jobs in service organizations, as these include multiple interpersonal relationships which are a major source of distress.

Furthermore, the magnitude and direction of the effects of openness to experience on attractive working environment and social responsibility differs between applicants with and without working experience on the industry. Conscientiousness is also likely to predict the emphasis put on development opportunities, attractive working environment, and attractive rewards only for applicants with previous employment experience in the hotel industry. Similarly, it is only for these applicants (with previous employment experience in the hotel industry) that openness to new experience can predict that desire for increased attractive working environment and social responsibility and extraversion seems to predict the desire for development opportunities only for those with previous employment. Those without previous employment in the industry may be eager to compromise and settle down with what is offered by employers, as they have no previous experience and hence expectations to build upon. Concerning similarities, regardless of work experience in the hotel industry, increased agreeableness seems to predict applicants' need for attractive rewards while high conscientiousness is likely to increase their desire for recognition and healthy working relations and social responsibility.

Concerning self-esteem, the current study exemplifies the role of self-esteem for individuals applying for non-managerial frontline job positions in the hotel industry. First of

all, our study shows that applicants' self-esteem exerts a positive direct effect on all facets of employer attractiveness, but with significant variations between applicants with and without previous employment in the hotel industry. Specifically, self-esteem strengthens the negative relationship between conscientiousness and attractive working environment and between conscientiousness and social responsibility of the prospective employer for those with no previous employment experience but it dampens it for those with work experience. This trend may be explained by the fact that this is the first job for people that have a high overall emotional evaluation of their own worth and they would rather not compromise with a work environment that wouldn't be totally satisfactory. When aiming to hire experienced individuals that have a high level of conscientiousness then the degree of attractiveness of the professional environment would depend on self-esteem. The trend shows that experienced job applicants have an increased desire to join an attractive working environment, a tendency seen even more strongly for those with high self-esteem.

Moreover, the study clearly shows that the applicants with high self-esteem but without work experience have a higher interest in recognition and healthy relationships than those of low self-esteem, although following a decreasing trend as conscientiousness grows. Also, achieving recognition from managers and forming collegiate relationships presents a high but decreasing importance for entry-level applicants having high self-esteem and conscientiousness, due to being well aware of their self-worth as employees and of their carefulness in delivering the work associated to their particular roles. Similarly, high self-esteem experienced applicants with high level of conscientiousness show a decreasing interest in recognition and healthy relationships, because they feel quite confident already. This is opposite to the experienced but low self-esteem prospect employees who look forward to gaining recognition for their performance and being part of a collegiate environment. Then, hotel job applicants with high conscientiousness and high level of self-esteem but with

a lack of work experience demonstrate a higher interest for service quality and social responsibility than the ones with low self-esteem; however, there is a decreasing trend for individuals with high self-esteem and an increasing one for those with low-self-esteem and when conscientiousness peaks, then low self-esteem prospect employees seem to be more interested in hotels' social responsibility than high self-esteem ones. Another relationship that is also moderated in a significantly different way by self-esteem is that between applicant's openness to new experiences and prospective employer's attractive working environment, as this relationship is weaker for applicants without work experience and stronger for applicants with work experience.

## *5.2 Theoretical implications*

On a theoretical basis, our findings suggest that individuals who apply for frontline job posts in upscale hotels do have varying preferences (and hence probably expectations) in terms of what an employer should be like and offer to its members, providing hence a more holistic view of employer attractiveness. These findings offer support to the application of the P-E fit theory and the ASA cycle in the prediction of the desired profile of upscale hotels as employers.

This study has also produced an employer attractiveness factor structure of upscale hotels in the UK, in terms of frontline job positions in, identifying attractiveness as the amalgam of development opportunities, attractive rewards, attractive working environment, recognition and healthy working relationships, and social responsibility characterizing hotels as prospective employers. This may be very useful to researchers for measuring potential employees' perceptions of hotel attractiveness in future studies. The fact that the dimensions

of attractiveness that emerged from this study diverge to some extent from those identified by Berthon et al (2005) indicates that the content of attractiveness may significantly vary among industries, highlighting thus the need to investigate it on a very specific – in terms of industry and organizational category - employer basis. Moreover, our proposed framework suggests that both self-esteem and working experience in the industry are very important factors when modeling individuals' willingness to work for hotels.

### *5.3 Practical Implications*

Based on our results, managers of up-scale hotels could focus first on promoting attractive rewards, recognition and healthy relationships, and development opportunities, and then on social responsibility follows and attractive work environment (the attractive work environment seems to be taken for granted in such hotels). Then, building and retaining a strong employer brand, suggests that—regardless of job vacancies—hotel managers need to include current employees' everyday working experience and career path, in addition to successful work practices in their regular advertising agenda (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Moreover, recruiters should first of all make sure they have a thorough understanding of the profile of the hotel (or hotel chain) they recruit for in order to form their communication mix towards applicants accordingly. Doing so is necessary, as the employer profile of the hotel shown is likely to prescribe the applications to be gathered during their recruitment process. Additionally, given that personality traits designate to a significant level the hotel that individuals may choose (or prefer) to work for, they may define or constrain recruiting agencies' choices on applicant-hotel matching.



This way, they may realize that they may have to change their priorities in terms of what they offer their employees, if they are to attract applicants of different profile than they currently employ or attract. To put it differently, our findings may pinpoint the undesirable message that reaches their potential applicants and keeps some of them from actually applying. For instance, if the organization seeks extravert applicants for reception job positions, it needs first to create opportunities for development and second to advertise them enough for applicants to learn about them. If the hotel is managed in a more centralized and autocratic manner, respecting rules is a top priority and therefore applicants who score high in conscientiousness (at least in the case of reception job positions) must be sought. Similarly, a hotel that is more flexible and seeks to offer its guests personalized care, should prefer for its reception applicants individuals that are high in agreeableness. These insights should be put in practice through a successful liaison of human resources, marketing, top administration and recruiting agencies in order to achieve best possible employee hiring.

Additionally, the associations and interactions between personal traits and employability factors are crucial in order to make the best possible person-job fits and attract the best talent. For instance, recruiters in the hotel industry are likely to attract inexperienced conscientious applicants by promoting an attractive working environment, to the extent that these applicants are characterized by low self-esteem. With regards to recognizing top performance and promoting healthy relationships in the working environment, recruiting agents should try to adjust their communication during the recruitment process according to applicants' self-esteem on a personal level. Then, recruiters hiring for hotel frontline posts should be aware that conscientious applicants with a high level of self-esteem but with a lack of work experience demonstrate a higher interest in recognition and healthy relationships and social responsibility than those with low self-esteem. Concerning, experienced applicants, high conscientiousness seems to reduce the sought for organizations' social responsibility

only for those characterized by low self-esteem. Another useful insight is that job recruiters should try to gain information on the combined effect between applicants' degree of openness to new experiences, their self-esteem, and their work experience in the hospitality industry, when evaluating their desire for working in an attractive environment.

Making a comparison between applicants with and without work experience in the hotel industry, findings suggest that the latter are more likely to settle for less. Yet, it is important that hotel managers keep in mind that these reduced expectations may last only for as long as they feel confident enough to search for another job, therefore putting in danger the investment that the hotel made on them up to that point or—even worse—failing to fulfill their guests' expectations.

All in all, recruiters in the hospitality sector need to adjust their selection strategy according to these expectations. In doing so, they should try to assess their applicants' profile by addressing related questions during the interview process (using the Critical Incidents Technique), and by inviting applicants to participate in problem solving events and role playing. These combined approaches are likely to offer recruiters a better understanding of the actual personality profile of their potential employee before they make their selection, ensuring the best possible fit between newcomers and the organization and benefiting from their long stay and healthy contribution.

## **6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

As with any study, ours has some limitations that ought to be taken into account when interpreting its findings. First of all, it has been conducted only among applicants in the UK, thus the findings of this study cannot be safely generalized among other national populations.

Additionally, participants of this study had applied only for non-managerial, frontline job posts in up-scale hotels. Therefore, the desired profile of hotels as employers may significantly differ among individuals that are able to fill managerial job positions or have expertise in a particular field. As such, future researchers could test our propositions among applicants of other job positions (managerial, back-office, etc.), in middle scale hotels and hotels outside the UK, in order to identify what constitutes the desired profile of a hotel as an employer, taking into consideration the unique mix among the personality profile of the applicants – the profile of the job position – and the hotel ranking.

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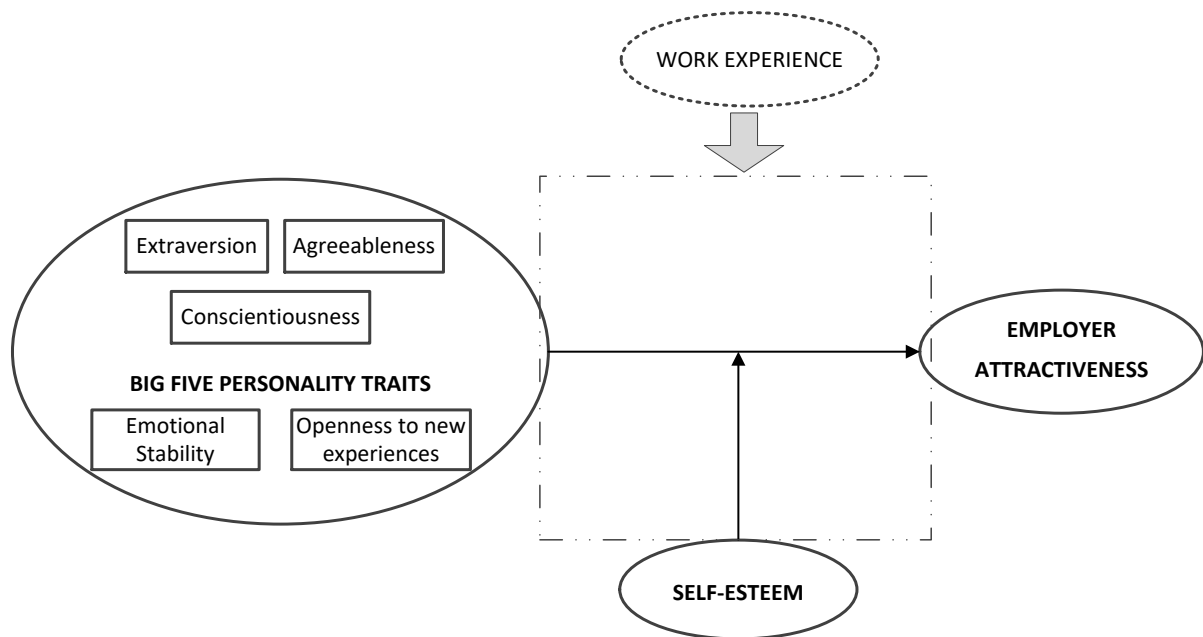
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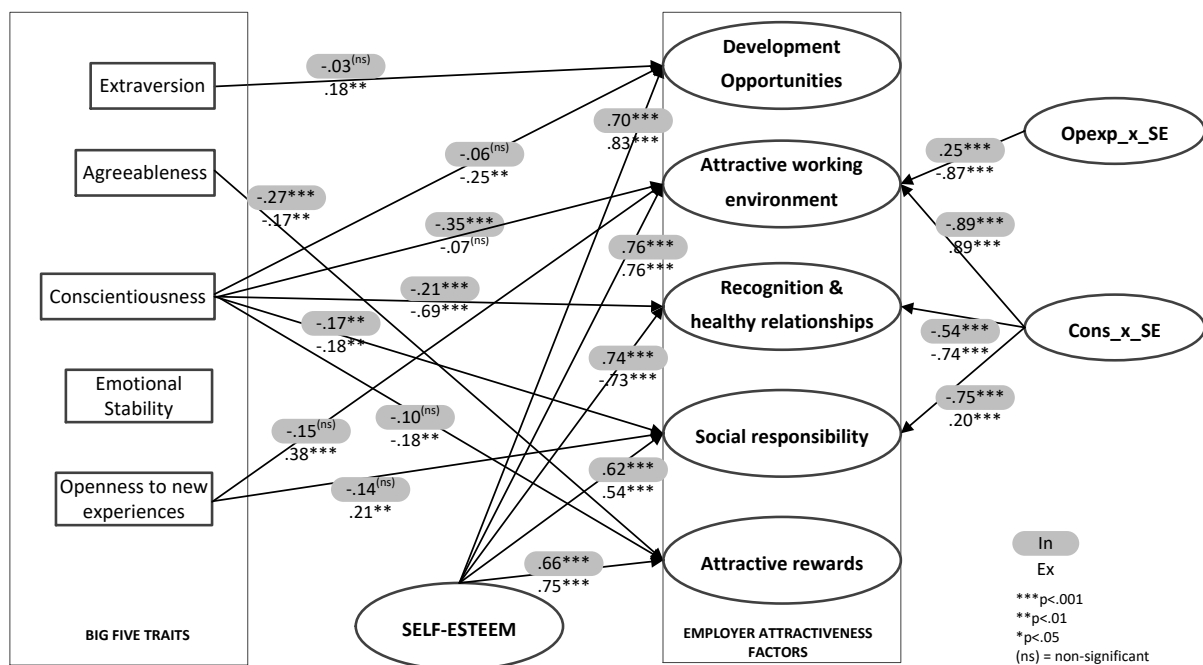
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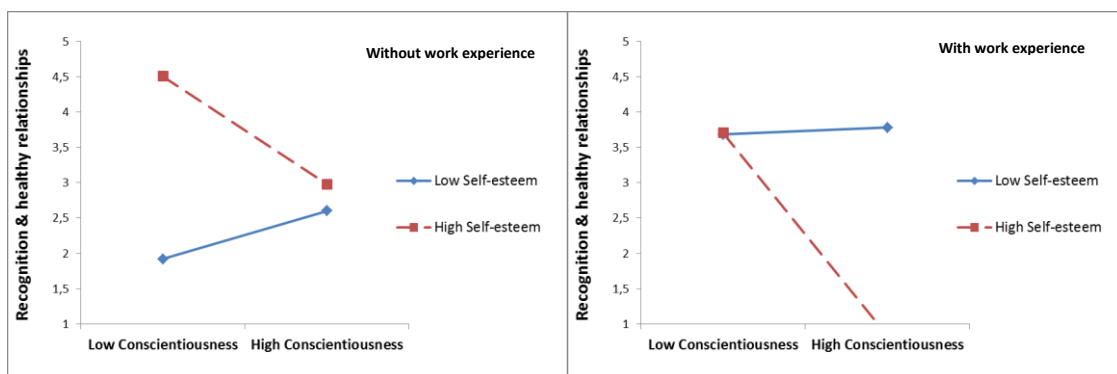
**Figure 1.** The proposed model.



**Figure 2.** Structural model results for both groups of respondents.



**Figure 3.** Plots of conscientiousness  $\times$  Self-esteem interactions predicting attractive working environment for both groups of job applicants.

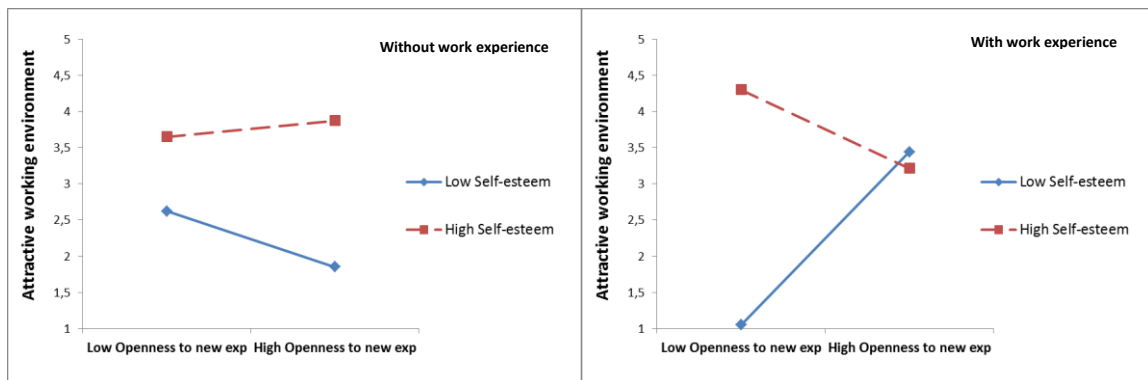


**Figure 4.** Plots of conscientiousness  $\times$  Self-esteem interactions predicting Recognition & healthy relationships for both groups of job applicants.



**Figure 5.** Plots of conscientiousness  $\times$  Self-esteem interactions predicting social responsibility for both groups of job applicants.





**Figures 6.** Plots of openness to new experiences  $\times$  Self-esteem interactions predicting Attractive working environment for both groups of job applicants.

**Table 1.** Fit Indices of the measurement and structural multigroup models.

Fit Indices	Measurement model	Structural model	Criteria
$\chi^2/\text{df}$	2.845 for $p < .001$	2.277 for $p < .001$	$< 5.0$
CFI	.913	.932	$> .90$
TLI	.904	.928	$> .90$
RMSEA	.059	.050	$< .08$
SRMR	.0605	.0572	$< .09$ (CFI $> .92$ )

Note:  $\chi^2/\text{df}$ : chi-square normed, CFI: Comparative fit index, TLI: Tucker Lewis index, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation, SRMR: Standardized root mean residual.

**Table 2.** Results obtained for the structural model relationships tested for both groups of respondents.

Regression paths			Experience	St.RW	S.E.	C.R.	p
Development Opportunities	←	Extraversion	In	-.033	.05	.567	.571
			Ex	.181	.07	2.342	.019
Attractive rewards	←	Agreeableness	In	-.266	.07	-2.947	.003
			Ex	-.170	.07	-2.187	.029
Development Opportunities	←	Conscientiousness	In	-.058	.08	-.683	.495
			Ex	-.252	.09	-2.812	.005
Attractive working environ	←	Conscientiousness	In	-.351	.08	-4.061	<.001
			Ex	-.067	.07	-.918	.359
Recognition & healthy relations	←	Conscientiousness	In	-.211	.08	-2.705	.007
			Ex	-.691	.10	-6.910	<.001
Social responsibility	←	Conscientiousness	In	-.167	.08	-2.088	.037
			Ex	-.182	.09	-2.022	.043
Attractive rewards	←	Conscientiousness	In	-.096	.08	-1.036	.300
			Ex	-.176	.09	-2.251	.024
Attractive working environ	←	Opexp	In	-.153	.08	-1.659	.097
			Ex	.383	.09	3.505	<.001
Social responsibility	←	Opexp	In	-.140	.09	-1.598	.110
			Ex	.214	.10	-2.583	.010
Attractive rewards	←	Self-esteem	In	.657	.04	15.395	<.001
			Ex	.745	.06	11.825	<.001
Development Opportunities	←	Self-esteem	In	.695	.05	13.666	<.001
			Ex	.825	.06	13.111	<.001
Social responsibility	←	Self-esteem	In	.620	.05	11.698	<.001
			Ex	.544	.05	10.686	<.001
Recognition & healthy relations	←	Self-esteem	In	.740	.06	11.762	<.001
			Ex	-.729	.07	-10.125	<.001
Attractive working environ	←	Self-esteem	In	.760	.06	-12.258	<.001
			Ex	.755	.07	11.797	<.001
Attractive working environ	←	Cons_x_SE	In	-.888	.06	-14.095	<.001
			Ex	.888	.06	14.322	<.001
Recognition & healthy relations	←	Cons_x_SE	In	-.543	.08	-6.621	<.001
			Ex	-.739	.08	-9.354	<.001
Social responsibility	←	Cons_x_SE	In	-.756	.08	-9.333	<.001
			Ex	.204	.08	2.675	.008
Attractive working environ	←	Opexp_x_SE	In	.247	.07	3.431	<.001
			Ex	-.867	.07	-12.565	<.001

Note: Cons: Conscientiousness, Opexp: Openness to new experiences, SE: Self-esteem, In: without work experience in the hotel industry, Ex: with work experience in the hotel industry, St. RW: Standardized regression weight, S.E.: Standard error, C.R.: Critical ratio, p: p-value.

**Table 3.** Critical Ratios Differences of regression weights with respect to level of experience.

	Inexperienced applicants		Experienced applicants		z-score
	Unstd. RW	p	Unstd. RW	p	
Development Opportunities ← Extraversion	-.029	.571	.159	.019	2.207**
Attractive rewards ← Agreeableness	-.210	.003	-.162	.029	.473
Development Opportunities ← Conscientiousness	-.055	.495	-.253	.005	-1.637
Attractive working environ ← Conscientiousness	-.333	.000	-.067	.359	2.431**
Recognition & healthy relation ← Conscientiousness	-.211	.007	-.693	.000	3.702***
Social responsibility ← Conscientiousness	-.188	.037	-.218	.043	.249
Attractive rewards ← Conscientiousness	-.088	.300	-.211	.024	-.973
Attractive working envir ← Opexp	-.136	.097	.326	.000	3.766***
Social responsibility ← Opexp	-.147	.110	.268	.010	3.083**
Attractive rewards ← Self-esteem	.662	.000	.749	.000	1.142
Development opportunities ← Self-esteem	.697	.000	.828	.000	1.632
Social responsibility ← Self-esteem	.623	.000	.547	.000	1.025
Recognition & healthy relations ← Self-esteem	.741	.000	-.730	.000	15.335***
Attractive working environ ← Self-esteem	.763	.000	.755	.000	.083
Attractive working environ ← Cons_x_SE	-.889	.000	.890	.000	20.151***
Recognition & healthy relations ← Cons_x_SE	-.546	.000	-.740	.000	1.665
Social responsibility ← Cons_x_SE	.757	.000	.206	.008	8.265***
Attractive working environ ← Opexp_x_SE	.247	.000	-.869	.000	10.982***

Note: Cons: Conscientiousness, Opexp: Openness to new experiences, SE: Self-esteem, Unstd. RW: Unstandardized Regression Weight, p: p-value, \*\*\* p-value < 0.01; \*\* p-value < 0.05; \* p-value < 0.10

## Appendix A

Constructs and indicators used in the measurement models for job applicants with and without work experience.

Construct	Item
<b>Big Five personality traits</b>	
Extraversion	I see myself as extraverted, enthusiastic.
	I see myself as reserved, quiet (R).
Agreeableness	I see myself as critical, quarrelsome (R).
	I see myself as sympathetic, warm.
Conscientiousness	I see myself as dependable, self-disciplined.
	I see myself as disorganized, careless (R).
Emotional stability	I see myself as anxious, easily upset (R).
	I see myself as calm, emotionally stable.
Openness to new experiences	I see myself as open to new experiences.
	I see myself as conventional uncreative (R).
<b>Self-Esteem</b>	
Self-worth	I feel that I'm a person of worth, or at least on an equal plane with others
	I feel that I have a number of good qualities
	I am able to do things as well as most other people
	I take a positive attitude toward myself
	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself
Self-deprecation	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure (R)
	I feel I do not have much to be proud of (R)
	I wish I could have more respect for myself (R)
	I certainly feel useless at times (R)
<b>Employer Attractiveness</b>	
Development opportunities	A springboard for future employment

	Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organization
	Gaining career-enhancing experience
	Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking
	Job security within the organization
Attractive working environment	A fun working environment
	Working in an exciting environment
	Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution
	Opportunity to teach others what you have learned
	Acceptance and belonging
	Happy work environment
Recognition & healthy relationships	Recognition/appreciation from management
	Having a good relationship with your superiors
	Having a good relationship with your colleagues
	Supportive and encouraging colleagues
	The organization both values and makes use of your creativity
Social responsibility	The organization produces high-quality products and services
	The organization produces innovative products and services
	Humanitarian organization – gives back to society
Attractive rewards	Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution
	An above average basic salary
	An attractive overall compensation package

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